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ABSTRACT

A seminar was held in England in 1981 to come up with a systematic, detailed analysis of argument and with suggestions on how it should be taught on the secondary level. Within a framework of questions designed to distinguish types and purposes of argument, members of the seminar analyzed four essays paragraph by paragraph. Their comments clustered under the following five headings, which they concluded offer teachers and examiners guidelines for assigning and evaluating arguments: How logical--how complex a rationale? How coherent? What quality of evidence--personal or public? What significance in the stance to the topic and tone to the reader or opponent? What control of language and form? The major conclusions of the seminar were that (1) tasks should arise out of the experience of the pupils; (2) students write best when they are operating as experts, are given a clear context within which to write, and are allowed to create their own titles; (3) teachers should give a focus, not titles; (4) audience requirements and context must be clearly defined; (5) one of the major aims in developing an argument ought to be clarification of the thinking process; (6) arguments do not always have to be in essay form; and (7) empty structures should not be given priority over content. (JL)

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TEACHING AND ASSESSING ARGUMENT

Discussion Booklet 2: a report on the 1981 C.E.E. English Cross-Moderation Exercise

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The Complexity of Argument

It is difficult to overestimate the importance in everyday life of being able to argue logically and rationally. Thus if secondary education is to have real value, and to prepare children for adult life, the ability to argue and to understand argument should have a central place. Ideally it should be encouraged and developed in several subjects; in this booklet we are concerned with how it is taught and assessed in English.

During the 1980 Cross-Moderation Exercise two examples of Argument were considered. As we reported,[1] it soon became clear that "the notion of an argumentative essay subsumed several different kinds of tasks." This immediately raised uncertainties about the kinds of criteria to apply, in teaching and in examining. By the end of the seminar, despite our combined experience in the teaching and examining of English, we all felt rather inadequate. Argument within the English lesson seemed to be a very ill-defined area. It was agreed that further work had to be done.

One thing the seminar had achieved was to make a start with a tentative answer to the question: What purposes does Argument serve? There is a difference, for example, between fiercely defending (or attacking) a position and trying to stand back to consider it dispassionately, acknowledging its strengths and limitations. These are only two purposes and there will clearly be others. No examination syllabus, so far as we know, makes this clear; nor for that matter do any of the standard works on the teaching of English - despite the fact that Argument has been traditionally thought of as part of the English curriculum, and is regularly found in English examinations.

Clarifying what we understand by Argument

In preparation for the 1981 seminar, therefore, the writers undertook a more systematic, detailed analysis of the subject. As we scrutinized exam papers at O Level and CSE, it soon became clear that the model underlying many of the questions was derived from a debating tradition. Over-arching general propositions were being offered for supposedly serious discussion, unprepared and within an hour. The emphasis could only be on debating skills - not on developing a considered personal viewpoint. Indeed in some cases we doubted whether the examiners themselves were equipped to discuss the issues.

On analysis, we realised that a clear distinction needed to be made between arguments that depended on personal experience and arguments that

demanded an ever-widening range of public knowledge. It is one thing to argue from personal experience about, say, the benefits of doing a week-end job, and quite another to generalise about the benefits of any week-end job to all teenagers. It is an accepted tradition in the English lesson that pupils should probe their own experience and broaden their perspectives by listening to accounts of similar experiences from others in their class. But important as they are, these experiences will inevitably be limited and lead only to carefully qualified statements about local patterns of behaviour and opinion. Wider generalisations demand directed reading and research-type enquiries, placing the local pattern in a broader perspective.

In other words, learning to argue implies learning to generalise. This means being able to take public knowledge and relate it to your own personal experience, supporting, modifying or changing the generalisations that you thought were valid. It also implies learning to acknowledge the limitations of your own experience, on the one hand, and of the available public knowledge, on the other. That is to say, students should gradually realise that the conclusions drawn may necessarily be provisional and open to modification.

This lead us to a discovery, the realisation that there is a crucial distinction to be made between arguing through to a conclusion (however provisional), and thinking around or mulling over an issue. In ruminative "essays" of the latter kind there is no pressure to take sides, reach a final justification, or draw conclusions. The emphasis lies in sorting out for yourself what, on reflection, you feel to be the important factors, or aspects of the question. We have come to see this kind of opportunity in writing as an important bridge into Argument proper.

In our analysis, we drew a further distinction between argument that leads to decision and action, on the one hand, and, on the other, argument concerned with opinions and beliefs. Both are essential to everyday life, and frequently, of course, they interact. There was little evidence in the exam papers that this distinction was being borne in mind when the questions were set.(2)

A Provisional Frame for Argument

We are proposing, then, that in planning work on Argument, teachers, pupils and examiners should ask themselves at least the following sequence of questions:

1. Does the argument draw largely or entirely on personal experience, or does it call for public knowledge - and if so, what support should the pupil be given?
2. Does the argument lead direct to decision (and action), or is it concerned with opinion and belief - or both?

Having considered these two points:

3. Does the issue call for rumination and mulling over at this stage rather than arguing towards a conclusion?
4. Alternatively, is the issue one that calls for the student to argue through to a decision or conclusion?
5. Is the issue one where it would be appropriate for the student to be encouraged to advocate - by defending or refuting a position?
6. Alternatively, is the issue one that calls for an overview to be attempted, where the student tries to stand back and consider conflicting factors dispassionately - possibly, but not necessarily, coming to a conclusion?

Preparing the Seminar

All Boards had agreed to send examples of Argument, drawn from Course Work folders or Examinations and awarded either Grade I or Grade III.

However, in sifting this material the writers discovered two things: first, there were few examples of Argument, and, second, even among those we found several were confused and formulaic, without much evidence of engagement with the issue. As a result we had to rule out the possibility of discussing grade level differences in Arguments of a specific type. Instead we had to concentrate or testing the categories described in our paper (which was circulated in advance to members of the seminar); looking for features that would help us all understand what was involved from the student's point of view; describing the kinds of strength and weakness each essay exemplified; and finally in discussing implications for teaching and examining.

Four essays were selected for analysis paragraph by paragraph (and, at times, line by line), as in the previous seminar. In each case the seminar began by reading the essay aloud.

Criteria arising from the Seminar Discussion

During the seminar careful notes were made: when we came to analyse these

we found that the line by line comments seemed to cluster under five headings:

- how logical - how complex a rationale?
- how coherent?
- what quality of evidence - personal or public?
- what significance in the stance to the topic, and tone to the reader or opponent?
- what control of language and form?

It was particularly interesting to the writers to find that these implicit criteria overlapped with several that we had suggested in the earlier report[3] and helpfully modified them.

(1) An Example of Advocacy?

4, C..... C....,
I.....,
W....
w.. 4..

5, November, 1981.

Dear Sir,

After reading your article on cannabis smoking, in the issue dated 25.5.81, I feel impelled to put pen to paper and give an oposite view to a totally bias, and at times completely wrong review of the habit. I realise that cannabis is an illegal drug, but surely the article should have been about the legalization campaign, not being firmly opposed to it. I must at once state, cannabis is the only drug that is will support the legalization of, and I am totally against the use of hard drugs, such as LSD, Cocaine and all the Opiates. The sole reason for my singleing out cannabis as the drug I support is plainly obvious, Cannabis is a non-adictive, harmless drug, as oposed to the other harder drugs which will kill you (which has been proved). Perhaps the author of the article, Mr Howard S....., should look a little more closely at some of the comments he made, and compare them to alcohol. He said, "Smoking cannabis is an anti-social habit." I disagree, mainly people will smoke together which surely is a social activity. Also there are no nasty side effects from cannabis, or 'dope', but how many people will drink 8, or 10 pints and not be ill afterwards, especially the next morning. I refer mainly to a hangover, because there is not one after a 'smoke', quite the oposite in fact, one will be able to get up much easier, in the morning, and will feel much

more awake and lively, and also will be in a much better frame of mind. How mainly people feel like that with a hangover?

Mr S.... talked of reports of madness in Eastern countries, resulting from regular usege of the drug, but very few have occured in the West. This is perhaps because the cannabis in Eastern parts is impure. Surely, if made legal, the plant's purity and strength could be easily controlled. Mr S..... also said that regular smokers often turn to hard drugs, heroine, LSD, etc. He never once stated where his information and evidence came from, in his article. Although I realise this may happen, I don't know of any cannabis smokers who have ever turned to a harder drug, but again if it was made legal then people may not have to buy from the 'pushers' who also may be selling hard drugs, thus cutting out a lot of temptation, and availability. Also if made legal, they could push the fact of hard drugs being lethally dangerous, so that people wouldn't think that because cannabis is legal, then other drugs are less harmful.

Mr S..... offered a suggestion the cannabis smoking leads to violence. Where has this ever been proved true? Cannabis calms the person, and makes him feel happy, and obviously friendship stems from happiness.

Should we legalize a drug which leads to a state of dependance? Mr S..... asked. Mr S....., please compare the rate of dependance for cannabis to that of alcohol or nicotine.

Is it better to make criminals out of lots of people than to face the problem of legal cannabis use?

Yours faithfully,

Nick H....

The Framework

There seem to be three enabling factors. An article has been published which the student feels impelled to refute. There is a strong sense of purpose throughout; the writer is engaged.

Several of the arguments seem to him false. Thus, when he begins his reply he is "arguing in a framework" - not building a case from scratch. The seminar felt that putting the student into this position was a great support.

Finally, a letter offers a form with a real audience in mind. Although it is a task that calls for a good deal of control of language, the

challenge is worthwhile. We will consider the letter, then, in terms of its achievements and limitations, using these five criteria.

Achievements & Limitations

How logical - how complex a rationale? The student feels there are three important points in the original article that he wants to refute: that smoking cannabis is "anti-social", that it induces "madness", and that it "leads to violence." He also makes two positive claims for cannabis - that it is "non-addictive" and "harmless" - and compares it in these respects with an established drug, alcohol. So the structure of the arguments is simple but logical:

REFUTE	ASSERT
- not anti-social	- harmless) compared
- not leading to madness (normally)	- non-addictive) with alcohol
- not leading to violence	- calming

We note that when assertions are made, there is no attempt to buttress them with arguments - a point we shall return to. Refutation, on the other hand, demands some supporting argument and the seminar noted a shift from the rather "naive style of refuting anti-social" to a "more sophisticated" approach to the issue of madness. Members pointed in the latter case to new features in the language; "perhaps", "may" and "could" express a less dismissive attitude to his opponent, a readiness to concede some truth in the criticism. The argument runs through a whole paragraph, with a complex "structure". It was at this point, the seminar felt, that the student might actually have been learning as he wrote - crystalising and deepening his own thoughts.

How coherent? The student signals his intention in the opening paragraph, by asserting that "the article should have been about the legalisation campaign." The desire to see cannabis legalised gives his letter a theme beyond his individual arguments: he returns to it in the complex central paragraph, and again in the concluding section. This theme offers a rationale for the whole letter, unifying its parts: the letter is not simply a list of refutations and counter-claims. The argument is addressed not simply to opinion but to action.

What quality of evidence (personal or public)? This is a massive issue in the public domain, so it is not sufficient merely to argue from personal experience.

In looking at his opponent's arguments the student assumes the need for "information and evidence", "Where has this ever been proved true?" he asks. He is right to do so, especially of someone writing an article. One would expect evidence marshalled from a variety of sources, a careful analysis of factors affecting the actual uses of a drug, and so on.

But isn't he hoisted with his own petard? There is little in his letter to suggest he is drawing on more than personal experiences (direct or indirect) to support his argument. The only suggestion of public knowledge comes in his statement that "the cannabis in Eastern parts is impure."

This was a weakness in the letter, the seminar felt, but it arose inevitably from the difficulty of attempting such a task without first getting guidance on how to discover and analyse the evidence available.

What significance in the stance? We judge the stance (and tone) in an argument according to the intention; thus no-one expects an advocate to take a comprehensive perspective or to concede more than s/he need. But the question remains, is the appeal simply to emotion or does it include reason? And how dismissive, condescending, opinionated... or reasonable, tolerant, and civil is the attitude to the opponent? (Obviously the opponent's initial attitude will also affect the way we respond, and can justify at times a tough, uncompromising tone.)

In this case, the student starts by "letting off steam (impelled)," as the seminar noticed. There is a "reactive-destructive" note at times in the early part of the letter. Effectively he "damms his opponent". But the tone does change, adding qualifications and concessions, and becoming more "active-constructive". There is more attempt to reason with the opponent, and possibly to appeal to his better judgement. Examples of the language before and after this change include:

- give an opposite view to a totally biased...completely wrong
- the sole reason... is plainly obvious
- I disagree ... quite the opposite in fact

- This is perhaps because
- Surely, if made legal, ... could be easily controlled
- Although I realise this may happen,
- Mr S...., please compare...
- Is it better to make criminals... than to face the problem...?

In context, these features seem to us to indicate a move from a more rigid to a more flexible stance, and from a rather dismissive to a more reasonable tone.

Without detracting from the student's achievements as advocate, we should add that there is one very important question for the teacher here: with a public issue as complex as this, is advocacy enough - as a vehicle for helping the student to probe and understand what is involved? We suggest that given the sort of interest this letter shows, it deserves to be treated as a half way stage in a more complex learning project.

What control of language and form? Overall, the letter shows a wide range of rhetorical strategies, which the student is able to draw on flexibly: thus -

- After reading your article...I feel impelled to put pen to paper
- I realise... but surely the article should have ...
- The sole reason for my singling out...
- Perhaps the author of the article, Mr Howard S , should look a little more closely...
- Where has this ever been proved true?
- Mr S , please compare...
- Is it better to make criminals...?

In most respects - and increasingly as the letter develops - he shows a more confident control of the complexity of language forms needed to express his developing stance. Is this because throughout the letter he remains a person passionately concerned to communicate his point of view to the reader? There is also other evidence that the student has quite a confident control of the written medium - for the most part the complex sentence structures are punctuated effectively, thus aiding the reader. Occasionally, perhaps, a semi-colon would have helped, after "I disagree" for instance - but this is itself an indication of complexity of sentence structure he can use. However, seminar members did note the struggle at the opening to find a register appropriate to the occasion. There were several signs - a redundant "being", a misplaced "at once", an elliptical "compare them to alcohol", for example - that the student was not fully at ease with this rather formal, public form of discourse. Indeed he occasionally slips into a casual style, inadvertently and not for effect: thus, "I disagree, mainly people will smoke together."

(2) A Further Example of Advocacy?

Persuasive Essay

Abortion

I am absolutely against abortion. In my opinion women - teenagers especially are far too careless in their relationships. Nothing is wrong with having sex with a man you love, but if the woman knows she doesn't want a baby, she should take contraceptive action. Some women are so hopeless that they can't even remember to take the pill even when they've got them. That is why sterilisation is far better in the long run, if the woman is positive she never wants a child. Some women make their minds up too quickly concerning abortion. This is often because they are still in love with the man and feel that the baby would be an intrusion in the relationship. Sometime abortion is the man's decision because he is ashamed of the situation and doesn't want people to know the child is his. I think women ought to seek guidance if they are in this position, after all they have got up to twenty-eight weeks to decide what to do for definite. There are many childless couples who would love a baby but cannot have one and it annoys me to think that some irresponsible woman is having an abortion. Abortion to me, is murder. The foetus is alive from the very first moment and so it must be murder. Some women have to fight with their consciences if they have an abortion. They often feel guilty for a long time afterwards. Maybe I am unfeeling when I say 'rightly so', they should feel this way. But life is life and who is that woman to say what should happen to that foetus within her.

The only excuses in my mind for abortion are teenagers who have be raped or something similar. It would be extremely hurtful for them to have an illegimate child and would remind them of the incident. It is fairer that the child is not born at all. Women who are late on in life also ought to be excused having a baby. The child is much more likely to be deformed which wouldn't be very pleasant for either the parents or the baby. Battered wives must also be an exception, the baby would almost definately be battered too. I'd cry if I knew that this was happening if the woman had been offered the opportunity of having an abortion.

I think doctors ought to give contraceptives much more readily and be more choosy as to who they let have abortions. Children are very important and should be given the opportunity to live a full life. If the child is not happy, it can take its own life. If I got pregnant now, although I am at a crucial position in life and I would probably be rejected by my parents, I would definately go through with having the baby. If I decided afterwards I didn't want the child, I would have it put into care before it was old enough to realise what had happened. I wouldn't want murder on my conscience for the rest of my life!!

Lillian H....

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A problem of focus

In this case the advocate was writing not a letter but an essay. So far as we can see, there are no indications that the writer had an audience in mind, other than the teacher or examiner. Thus, there is no given framework to help her select and focus what she wants to say. Furthermore, the title - "Abortion" - is all-embracing and offers her no additional direction. We are told she is writing a "persuasive essay", but it seems that she is not clear either who she wants to persuade, or to what effect.

These are her problems. To appreciate her achievement despite them we must take the criteria questions in a different order.

Achievements and Limitations

How coherent? There are three themes in the essay. In the first paragraph, the student, having declared herself "absolutely against abortion", discusses what should be done to prevent the need arising or to counsel against that solution. In the second - contradicting her absolute moral judgement - she discusses "excuses" she would accept. In the third paragraph, after reverting to her first theme, she discusses what she would do personally, if she became pregnant (now). There are no explicit connections bridging the shift from one theme (and position) to another.

This lack of overall coherence suggests that in the act of writing she has begun to sort out her ideas and feelings, and, still unaware that she holds mutually contradictory positions, is left with an unresolved moral problem.

No-one can advocate from a confused position. We feel that what she needs - and perhaps is unconsciously looking for? - is a chance to ruminate and study a wider range of experience.

How logical - how complex a rationale? Within the first paragraph the ideas are logical, though probably not organised to their best advantage. Three arguments are put forward (in this order):

(a) women are far too careless (over contraception) -PREVENTION SUGGESTED
-some can't even remember to take the pill - " "

some women make up their minds too quickly - REASON SUGGESTED
- sometimes abortion is the man's decision - " "
GUIDANCE SUGGESTED

(b) many childless couples... would love a baby

(c) abortion is murder: women fight with conscience
feel guilty
have no right to say

For the sake of effective advocacy, the better order would be (c) + (a) + (b), though the student's conviction and the underlying logical connections probably carry the reader through.

Without warning to the reader there is then an abrupt shift as the second paragraph opens. However, within this paragraph the ideas are again logically presented. Three categories of women are "excused", as "it is fairer that the child is not born at all":

- teenagers who have been raped	REASON OFFERED
- women late on in life	" "
- battered wives	" "

There is just one odd intrusion - a sudden expressive response within the rational discourse. "I'd cry if I knew..." does not advance the argument but it may explain how the writer is accommodating herself emotionally (through pity for the women) to something she could not bear a paragraph earlier. ("Abortion to me, is murder".)

How to go on? One might have expected her to have continued in this personal vein, but - as if aware of her lapse - she moves on abruptly to an implicit theme of responsibility:

- doctors should give contraceptives more readily
and abortions more choosily
- the child should have the opportunity to live - or take its own life
- she herself would have the baby (if pregnant now)
but might put it into care

It is not clear what she is doing here. Is she trying to recover her original role of advocate? If so, the idea of a child's right to suicide is a naive intrusion. However, ending with a passionate statement of her own position allows her to be absolute again, and in some way to feel justified in her original unequivocal position.

Summing up: a diagnosis

We think we have offered enough evidence to show that this writer is confused. We could go on to consider her stance and tone (its simple assertiveness); the quality of evidence one would have to draw on for such a complex moral question (the range of personal testimonies, especially); her control of language and form (simple and positive, but without the previous writer's range). But as teachers our priority would be to consider this piece of writing as a draft and discuss with this pupil a better way of exploring the complexities of the question - and especially the moral dilemma that she has discovered in herself.

It seems, then, that she needs to be freed from the demands to persuade an audience and to be offered an opportunity to sort out what she thinks and feels in some form of ruminative writing.

The lesson for teachers and examiners is that the invitation to argue in the role of an advocate inevitably leads to simplification of the issue. When the issue is complex, and entails a broad rational policy, the student may often have confused and even conflicting feelings. These need to be acknowledged and mulled over. In this case many of us feel a genuine moral dilemma, and that cannot be considered reflectively if at the same time we are expected to act as a persuasive advocate.

(3) An Example of Arguing Through to a Conclusion?

A Critical Essay — Anthony B....

"Streaming in school is the best method for educating" discuss

What is streaming? The idea of streaming is to collect all pupils of the same educational ability together to form a group. This group then works at its own pace to make steady progress. The idea of streaming for school was developed after the coming of comprehensive system in 1965. Grammar schools do not need streaming because all pupils are of a good educational ability. Streaming does not only occur in school though. When you leave school, you are streamed into jobs of the same people in your job. All technicians work together. Throughout your life, you are streamed into different aspects of life.

The main advantage of streaming is you continually make progress, in theory. In practice different things can happen. You stream a group of pupils into groups of the same educational ability. Knowone can be defined as exactly the same as another person in any aspect of life. You might appear to be similar in one aspect as

another person, but totally different to that person in another aspect. The top group progress rapidly, going into subjects in great detail. The lower group progresses quite slowly and just outlines each subject. The teacher cannot go into detail, because the pupils will not understand. The middle sector has "peaks and troughs" of progression. Some apsects are grouped quite easily, some are not. Therefore you have three main sections for streaming.

There is one main disadvantage, which is the stem of little disadvantages that appear in school streaming. The problem is what happens to the pupils who cannot be streamed into one particular group. For example, a person might be streamed into a "middle of the road" group, but the work proves too easy for him/her - so he is moved up one group. This group might be covering different work, and this might prove too hard, so what can you do? If this continues, you end up with a pupil all scrambled up and not knowing weather he is good or bad. The pupil will get depressed and begin to dislike the lesson. If some people can understand the subject the teacher moves on, and this can happen when he is moved down. He will find the work easy, but 90% of the group won't even understand the basic concepts.

If this occurs during the fourth and fifth year examination build-up things might keep being covered and some might not be covered at all. Therefore exam success potential is limited. This could have an overall effect on your life at work.

Alternatively you can have a mixed ability scheme, like what it is at T..... T..... When you join the school, all types of children go into one class. They all have their own abilities and work as a single group. The group only progresses after everyone understands the topic. This can slow down the brighter children. There are no pace makers and so schools tend this to be a period of seeing the pupils capabilities for the fourth to sixth year. If the teacher has the time she may set several exercises so everybody can cope with one. Therefore knowone is kept back or pushed on. A mixed ability group is very demanding on the teacher.

Personally, I think a mixture of the both can be very sucessful. If you begin school with mixed ability the not so bright pupils will have an equal chance of gaining sucess. They will have to keep up, so they will already be doing well educationally. If you gradually turn to streaming but hold the groups stable and only move pupils when you are 90% sure that they will benefit from studying in a higher group, everyones sucess is guaranteed.

A Massive Proposition - beyond most 17+ students?

The first reaction in the seminar was that the student faced a "massive proposition" which most of us, despite many years in the profession, would find difficult to answer - indeed it is still the subject of controversy. To answer with any degree of competence, a body of research evidence would need to be read, sifted and analysed. The form of the question - "Streaming in school is..." - demands generalisation about any and every school. As the seminar said, the student is "cast in the role of ignorance"; the gap between his limited experience and the public knowledge assumed is too great to be bridged in the circumstances. Unfortunately, topics of this kind are all too frequent in traditional examination papers.

Achievements and Limitations

How logical - how complex a rationale? To demonstrate what is happening let us look closely at the first three paragraphs. The student begins by defining "the idea of streaming", giving his notion of how "the idea....developed" historically, and how it is carried over "into jobs" and "into different aspects of life". So the student tries to set the concept in a broader framework for the reader and does so connectedly - the problem being his historical inaccuracy and tendency to blur the edges of the concept when applying it beyond education.

The argument proper begins in the second paragraph when we are offered "the main advantage of streaming". It is a difficult paragraph to make sense of at first reading because of the gaps and disjunctions in the logic. In outline, the structure is as follows:

(a) advantage (in theory): You continually make progress

(b) BUT (in practice) : You stream a group...into groups of the same ability

No-one can be defined as exactly the same as another

You might appear to be similar in one aspect... but totally different in another

(c) The top group progresses rapidly

The lower group progresses quite slowly

The middle sector has 'peaks and troughs' of progression

(d) Therefore you have three main sections for streaming

There are two sources of confusion here for the reader. First, we would expect to move logically from (a) to (c). The long interpolation in (b) is confusing, especially as it is introduced by the sentence "In practice different things can happen", which leads one to think this is the main thrust of the paragraph's argument. More confusing still, nothing is said to relate (c) back to (a) when the practical advantages are finally reached.

The second source of confusion lies in the terminology. Instead of using the noun "stream", the student refers to "group (s)", "sector" and finally "section". The top, the lower and the middle appear now to refer to banding - but we can't be sure. The final "therefore" seems to be a non-sequitur.

Let us turn to the third paragraph. Once again there are gaps and disjunctions in the argument. In outline, the structure runs:

(a) main disadvantage: What happens to the pupils who cannot be streamed
(b) e.g. a person ... is moved up one group
this group might be covering different work
(which) might prove too hard
you end up with a pupil all scrambled up
(c) if some people understand...the teacher moves on
(d) this can happen when he is moved down
he will find the work easy
but 90% of the group won't even understand

The idea in (a) seems to arise from the point made in (b) in the previous paragraph, though the reader is not helped to see this - the student does not refer back. Nor does he make a clear logical connection with the next topic, (b), which is less an "example" about "pupils who cannot be streamed" than about problems of restreaming pupils who progress unusually fast. There is another jerk as the student moves from (b) to (c), and again when the problems of moving down are introduced within the same sentence as (c) but without any explicit logical connection. Finally, according to (d) 90% of the lower stream - who are supposedly correctly streamed - "won't even understand the

basic concepts." The student has got himself into such a confused struggle that he ends up talking nonsense.

On such evidence, the seminar felt it inconceivable that the student was using the essay to think things out for himself.

How coherent? At first sight (and perhaps in rapid marking?) the paragraph openings seem quite coherent:

- What is streaming?
- The main advantage of streaming
- There is one main disadvantage
- If this occurs during the fourth and fifth year
- Alternatively you can have a mixed ability scheme
- Personally, I think a mixture of both can be very successful

This structural frame looks very good. But has it been internalised, the seminar asked, or is it simply "formulaic", "an academic exercise"?

The lack of a rational flow within the paragraphs, such as we have just demonstrated, indicates that any apparent coherence between paragraphs is spurious and external, possibly forming an impediment to the student's own thoughts.

Overall diagnosis

One of the seminar summed the position up as follows. "This is a high tariff topic, philosophical and debatable. It produces a highly illogical essay in content, though pseudo-logical in form. It is remarkable that the student can sustain this kind of writing; he is out of his depth, yet hangs on to a structure. The whole topic is external, rather than internalised. It is a fake task, with much less personal involvement than might have been possible, perhaps? The topic is beyond him."

This discussion shows that if the quality of evidence, the logic of the argument and the overall coherence of the piece of writing are inadequate there is not a proper basis for assessing the students' control of language and form, and their ability to find an appropriate stance and tone for the intended reader.

With the present uncertainty among teachers and Boards the best that can be done is to offer "compensatory" marks for whatever is achieved within an overall failure - not necessarily of the student's making.

(4) An Example of Ruminative/Reflective Writing?

Scope for Learning Through Argument

Twice already we have noted that, in the seminar's view, the task selected (by teacher and/or student) had been formulated in such a way as to impede rather than enable learning to take place. Important stages in the process of learning seemed to have been omitted. The strategy most probably used - we all guessed - was class discussion, possibly followed by summaries in note form (by students or the teacher on the blackboard). Whether this hunch was correct or not, there were no signs that the students had been encouraged to collect further evidence, or to reflect on any points of conflict and perplexity raised in the discussion. They seem to have rushed into a final version of their ideas and feelings far too quickly.

Any argument that is worth sorting out in your mind and putting forward to others demands a fair amount of time and an amalgam of strategies to tease out the main issues for yourself.

Among the important messages of the seminar, then, is the need to include among those strategies the encouragement of students to find for themselves a wider spectrum of evidence (personal and public) and to take time to mull over and reflect on the issues, as they begin to grasp and comprehend them. Thus the need for ruminative pieces of writing, where the pressure to argue with and for others is taken off the student.

The next student is clearly a very able and mature person, but the approach he uses offers many valuable ideas for a more typical CEE student, especially in the upper grades. In discussing its characteristic achievements we will dwell on those aspects that are particularly illuminating, and simply sketch in the others.

Why I might vote for the Ecology Party

M.J. McA....

> Walking through Selly Oak on the eve of the Local Government elections, my eye was caught by a small group of people wearing green rosettes and carrying handfuls of green leaflets. They were standing in front of a small table taped to the front of which were some green posters that flapped furiously in the wind. Weighted down on top were more green leaflets. As I approached, I was handed a leaflet and told by the gentleman imparting it that he was canvassing for the Ecology

party and that he'd appreciate my vote for his candidate on Thursday. I had been aware of the existence of the Ecology party for several years, though I had never really considered what they were standing for, other than having a vague notion that they were anti-nuclear power and into wildlife preservation. I took the opportunity, therefore to ply members of the little group with questions about what the Ecology party, if elected to power, would do about unemployment and the decline of British manufacturing industry. The answers I received intrigued me. It seemed a little naive to talk about reversing the path of current progress away from high technology to labour intensive production: a rather too trendy alternative in times of high unemployment and one fraught with practical difficulties. I was stimulated into buying a copy of their short manifesto.

Back at home I read the green booklet with interest. The section headed 'Work' developed the party's ideas on industry and employment.

> 'Encourage craft industries...encourage co-ownership schemes and co-operatives... provide every incentive for small businesses to flourish and become the mainstay of the economy... adapt technology to a more human scale...'

As I read, I became aware that the proposals put forward by leading developement economists as being suitable for Third World countries seeking to stimulate natural 'organic' growth in their economies, were here being advocated by the Ecology party for Britain. Industry and work, it was said, should become an extension of a decentralised, community-based society. It transpired, as I read on that the party were very keen on decentralisation, seeing it as a fulfillment of real democracy. The manifesto appeared to be a little vague as to the level of autonomy local government should be given and I was not entirely convinced that a weakening of Central government would be a good thing, particularly its monetary and fiscal powers which are important to be able to control as economic regulators.

What did impress me, however, was the emphasis placed on community responsibility for health, education and social welfare.

> 'We must learn to work with people rather than for people, developing a system of care and welfare based in the community, rather than passed down from on high.'

A very laudable aim and I agreed wholeheartedly with the Ecology party in their view that many of society's problems stem from a breakdown in community-consciousness. Where there is no sense of belonging to something greater than oneself there is little incentive to put aside ones own interests and involve oneself with others. Yet it occurred to me that at best the Ecology

party could only provide an acceptable framework on which to rebuild a sense of community. It would take the participation of every individual to make it a reality. From what I have seen in history and from what I see around me, I don't honestly believe this will happen. The repeated experiments in Britain, Europe and America in the 19th Century by Robert Owen, St.Simon, Fourier and Cabet to found self reliant, caring communities, repeatedly failed for the same reasons. Utopian Socialism, textbook Marxism, and I think the Ecology party's Neo-Humanism fail because they overlook man's inborn evil. Although man would like to be good and community-consciousness he invariably falls to the temptation for self advancement as a substitute for a deep seated insecurity. Pride, accusations of unfair treatment and vicious rivalry are quick to bedevill the task of harmonious living and even the strongest willed, fairest minded people fall victim time after time.

In spite of all this, and aware as I am of all the faults, I would still like to consider the Ecology party. I am undecided on the nuclear power question, I am on the question of the complete abandonment of vivisection, but I am challenged by their idealism. If we are too quick to discourage idealists we are apt to surrender ourselves to the gloomy acceptance of our total depravity without giving expression to the deep-seated yearning for a higher purpose in life. The place for the idealist is that of society's conscience - to remind it that there are right values and noble aims to work towards and he should never be ashamed of his exalted position. That small collection of green rosetted enthusiasts in Selly Oak has made me carefully consider what I should do with my vote later this week.

How coherent?

Surprisingly, perhaps, the writer begins by telling us a story - "Walking through Selly Oak...my eye was caught." It is a very simple device, immediately engaging the reader. At the same time, it allows the writer to unfold successive stages in his appreciation and understanding of what the Ecology Party's ideas might mean to him, in terms of his own personal philosophy.

Having been handed a green leaflet, he takes the opportunity "to ply members of the little group with questions." This allows him to embed in the narrative - and comment on - some of his first impressions ("intrigued" "a little naive...rather too trendy"). The narrative continues: "Back at home I read the green booklet", and now begins an extensive account of key ideas together with a commentary and evaluation, which finally becomes general

and philosophic:

> "From what I have seen in history and from what I see around me, I don't honestly believe this will happen... the strongest-willed, fairest-minded people fall victim time after time."

However, the student doesn't end here, "In spite of all this, I would still like to consider the Ecology party", he says. He makes us aware that an internal argument is still going on in his mind. " I am undecided... I am challenged...(to) carefully consider what I should do with my vote later this week." The story hasn't finished and this writer knows how to keep the reader curious and intrigued!

To sum up: the seminar was impressed by the way this student was able to deal with a complex issue, and, starting from a concrete event, to weave together selected arguments from the green document and his critical reflections on these, with relevant ideas from his personal philosophy and his reading of politics and history. It is this complex synthesis that demonstrates the overall quality of coherence.

What significance in the stance and tone? The title - "Why I might vote" - sensibly reduces the scale of the enterprise by personalising it: a very different essay would have been required if the title had read "Why vote for...?" So the writer has taken the opportunity to set up a conversation with his reader, and an argument with himself. This stance to the topic is established with assurance right from the start.

As a result, the seminar noted, the "essay" expresses a personality throughout. The student is prepared to be critical - "a little naive", "rather too trendy" - but the criticisms themselves are qualified, as you see, and they are balanced by positive comments - "what did impress me", "a very laudable aim". Despite his own pessimism about "man's inborn evil" and "deep seated insecurity" he is challenged into acknowledging "the place for the idealist." He moves on from acknowledged ignorance, through an initial response to their oral answers, to an increasingly complex attitude. There is a steady effort not to romanticise the Party but to recognise for himself - and reveal to us - something of its potential.

- In spite of all this
- aware as I am of all the faults
- If we are too quick to discourage... we are apt to surrender ourselves
- he should never be ashamed

The tone is open and generous - essential qualities that allow room for the student to learn.

Summing Up on the Seminar

What criteria to use?

By the end of the first seminar we all felt how inadequate the criteria for evaluating Argument had been in past examinations - and equally in teaching. This second seminar has helped the writers to take their own thinking a major step forward, modifying as they did so the earlier criteria they had offered.

Without suggesting that the criteria developed in this booklet are definitive, we do believe that they offer both teachers and examiners a set of guideline questions to bear in mind:

a) as they set up the context for Argument;
b) as they respond and help students through the drafting stages;
c) as they review completed work with the students, helping them to realise their achievements and how they might extend their potential in their next piece of work.

We hope that our discussion of the selected pieces in this booklet indicates the potential use of these criteria. Let us try to lay them out here, then, in a rather fuller form.

- How logical - how complex a rationale? Has the student been helped to realise how complex the issue may be, the range of arguments to be considered, and the logical patterns they fall into? (Our discussion of several pieces has shown the value of schematic notes.)
- How coherent? Have the students clarified for themselves - with help - the purpose of their selected tasks. What precisely is each of them arguing for, or ruminating over or attempting to get an overview on? Do they help the

reader to see the way arguments within the paragraph, and from one paragraph to another, are related to an overall intention?

- What quality of evidence - personal or public? Has the teacher (or examiner) realised the full range of evidence that may need to be considered in the course of the argument? Have the students been helped to draw on and clarify any personal experience which is relevant? Have they been asked first, to consider, whether a wider range of evidence is needed, and, second, to find and marshal it, relating it to their own experience? How appropriate a selection has finally been made?

- What significance in the stance to the topic and tone to the reader or opponent? Has the student found an appropriate stance:

a) to explore an issue (personal, open, tentative..., perhaps);
b) to advocate a line (firm, committed, confident...);
c) or to attempt an overview (dispassionate, scrupulous, balanced...?)

These are some of the broader aspects of stance that facilitate or impede students as they try to carry through their intention.

Just as intention relates to audience, so there is an overlap between stance and tone. Perhaps the first question to ask is: has the student a clear sense of an audience s/he can cope with - or is the essay being served up simply for the teacher/examiner? Given the sense of a real audience, does the student's tone appropriately:

a) take a tough, uncompromising line against one opponent and a tolerant reasonableness against another;
b) invite the reader sympathetically to stand alongside - or even identify with them - as they mull over an issue;
c) interest and engage readers in the complexities of the issue, helping them to stand back from it?

The more complex the intention, the more varied and sophisticated will be the adjustments (and shifts) in tone.

- What control of language and form? Even the simplest levels of Logic, Coherence, Evidence, Stance and Tone make complex demands on a student's resources in language. So the first question is: can the student approach the task (or select some appropriate aspect) with a sense of expertise and some expectation of success - rather than a sense of ignorance? Given that this hurdle has

been jumped, a further series of questions follow:

a) Has the student been given adequate support both in the models of language offered in preliminary material, and in the (choice of) forms suggested?

b) As the work is being drafted, has the teacher a clear sense of the students' achievements (and the language resources these imply) as well as a diagnosis of any places where the language is not fully under control, or has broken down?

c) Does the student need advice on simplifying the approach, in order to make a first step towards more complex understanding? (For some students, should the initial target be something nearer the length of a paragraph than an essay?)

Proposals for consideration

We asked the chief examiners and moderators assembled in the seminar to note briefly the conclusions they had drawn. We have tried to summarise these in the seven points that follow, quoting their actual words.

1. "Tasks (with their topics) should arise out of the experience of the pupils, based on activities both personally significant and socially relevant. Motivation should therefore spring from inwards..." A distinction needs to be made between arguments depending on personal experience and those depending on a range of public knowledge. "Many topics of social and economic importance will be beyond the competence of the average 17+ candidate to discuss with any more than the shallowest consideration." Thus "teachers must prepare evidence for pupils if they want them to discuss complex issues." "My experience at O level and CEE convinces me that the standard discussion/argument essay is inappropriate for an examination situation. The lack of confidence in that situation, plus the constraint of time, force the writer into adopting superficial and taught formulae."

2. "It appears that students write best when they are:
   (a) operating as experts, either from personal experience or from sifted evidence;
   (b) given a clear context in which to write;

(c) perhaps allowed to create their own titles and decide the precise approach and terms of reference that each will adopt..."

The worst possible position is to be "cast in the role of ignorance."

3. "Don't give bald titles - give a focus." It may be a letter that invites a response. Both of the stronger essays here "enjoy the structural advantage of employing a sounding board (the article and manifesto) for their own writing." There will be many other varieties of sounding board, too - including writing by other students in the class.

4. "Audience requirements...and context must be clearly defined so that the exercise is relevant to the pupil personally and to the conditions of the society in which s/he lives. In this way s/he will be able to maintain a proper sincerity of purpose. This will lead to both realism and power of conviction in the writing. It also means much hard work and research into task construction for both teaching and examining."

5. "One of the major aims in developing an argument ought to be a clarification of the thinking process. Although the 'final' essay might well show the extent to which the candidate has developed a mastery of one particular kind of argument, the real value of a series of essays might be...a facilitation of learning..." "A candidate can use an essay as a method of clearing the mind, ruminating without the necessity of coming to a definite conclusion." Thus the "need for rumination, research, and time for thought - in class and at home."

6. We wrongly tend to "assume the essay form as a norm, and yet argument occurs in many contexts" - letters to the Press, "Any Questions", industrial disputes, manifestos, speeches to a resolution or amendment, cases put to local or government agencies, as well as reflective "essays", journal entries, and reading diaries.

7. "Avoid empty structures" - "the futility of teaching a formal structure, a framework for a set type of essay, without regard for the content and its development." "The structure is in a sense 'learned' - as in narrative writing it is limited to structures and strategies observed by

the writer elsewhere. The point is being able to choose from a range of structures/strategies..." "We need both micro and macro structures", and "I would favour explicitness" in discussing them.

The final proposal, as one examiner put it, is for "Integration". "The pupil's experience, the requirements of logic, and the practical relevance to audience must be integrated for successful argumentative writing. This is a long-term process involving planned courses in teaching and inevitably the use of course work studies in examination..."

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2. This paper "Argument: what does it mean to teachers of English?" is to be published in English in Education Vol.16, No.1 Spring 1982.

3. Criteria for Writing in English pp 13-17

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